

ONLY CONNECT

by MARIA VIERA

Contact:
Maria Viera Beatty
455 Seed Path NW
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110
maria.viera@csulb.edu
mbeatty@coregroupusa.com

562-277-8058

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ONLY CONNECT

SYNOPSIS

The lives of five lonely people randomly intersect for fleeting moments in a neighborhood bar. The play is about relationships that never develop and opportunities that are lost because of the changing values of contemporary society which make it impossible for us to “only connect.”

SETTING

A modest neighborhood bar.

TIME

Present or thereabouts.

CHARACTERS

SLADE: The bartender; in his thirties; easy-going and affable.

MATT: A man stranded somewhere in his forties. A regular at the bar. He wears a business suit, the coat is rumpled and his tie hangs loosely around his neck.

BRAD: A tightly-wound, and usually slightly drunk, young man in his late thirties who is working his way towards becoming an alcoholic.

LISA: An attractive woman hovering around 40; smart and confident.

KARA: A fun loving, up-beat woman in her late 20s.

Scene Breakdown:

All the scenes are set in The Bar. The scenes are separated by a quick LIGHTS DOWN/LIGHTS UP during which the actors either exit if they are not in the next scene or take a new place at the bar.

Scene 1: Brad, Kara, Slade "Phone Break-up"

Scene 2: Lisa, Slade "Zebra Stripes"

Scene 3: Lisa, Kara, Slade "Girl Talk"

Scene 4: All Five characters "Bar Talk"

Scene 5: All Five characters "The Dance"

Scene 6: All Five "Technology"

Scene 7: All Five "Politics"

Scene 8: All Five "Confessions"

Scene 9: Matt, Slade "Got me"

ONLY CONNECT

SCENE 1: early evening

AT RISE

(At a neighborhood bar, Slade, the bartender, cleans and wipes glasses behind the counter. Matt huddles around a drink placed on the counter in front of him. His phone is on the bar. He glances at it often. Brad enters.)

SLADE
Hey, Brad, what's up?

BRAD
I'm back on the dating scene.

SLADE
What happened to Teresa? Haven't seen her around for quite a while.

BRAD
We broke up last month.

SLADE
Sorry to hear that. You two seemed so...

BRAD
No big deal. Ships that pass in the night.

(Kara enters angrily texting away on her phone. She sits at the bar.)

BRAD
You trying to murder that thing?

KARA
Nope. But wouldn't mind murdering the textee. Wish I could send anthrax through this thing.

BRAD
That bad?

KARA
Terrorism by texting. (to Slade) Moscow Mule, please.

BRAD

Revenge texting? There must be an app for that.

KARA

I believe in the Greek idea of revenge—not an eye for an eye but a head for an eye.

BRAD

I can relate to that. I just broke up with my girlfriend—now ex-girlfriend-- last month.

KARA

I'm being broken up with right now here as we speak. Here look. (*shoves her phone in his face*) See. "I just don't think you turn me on enough to commit this much time." (*swiping the phone*) "I've started to see someone else who turns me on more than you do." (*swiping the phone*) "You'd be better off without me."

BRAD

Sorry. (*beat*) Maybe you are better off without him.

KARA

That's what everyone says to try to make you feel better. (*back at him*) Maybe you're better off without her.

BRAD

Maybe she's better off without me.

KARA

How can we all be better off without anyone? I don't see how it's better to be alone.

BRAD

Turn off your phone. Just turn off your phone. You don't have to take that from him. Don't respond. Just delete. That's it. It's over. No more. Here, give me the phone.

(He takes the phone and turns it off.)

BRAD

All gone. Don't you feel better?

KARA

Yeah, just great. Alive and well and doomed to live alone.

(He hands her the phone back.)

BRAD

See that wasn't so bad.

KARA

Thanks. *(beat)* What went wrong... with your relationship?

BRAD

Oh, nothing much. She just cheated on me.

KARA

(jokingly)

I hate it when that happens.

(He doesn't laugh.)

KARA

Sorry. Didn't mean to be flip. *(beat)* Don't tell me it was with your best friend.

BRAD

No, she hooked up with some guy at a bar. She was at a birthday party for one of her girlfriends. Seems it was more important to outdo her long-time best friend slash archrival than be true to me. Women just have to compete. It's in their DNA.

KARA

What about men? They'll compete over anything. Who can pee the furthest or belch the loudest.

BRAD

How come it's easier to tell a stranger your real feelings?

KARA

Because they don't judge?

BRAD

Maybe because they don't care. *(beat)* Hi, I'm Brad.

KARA

Kara. If you Google my name, Kara Brown, you get 92,000,000 results. And if you look at Images for Kara Brown you get everything from cowgirls to drag queens.

(Slade comes over to them.)

SLADE

Another round?

KARA

Not for me. Thanks.

(Kara makes motions to leave. Turns on her phone and puts it in her handbag.)

SLADE

You know, Zuckerberg started all this 'cause he was a lonely, introverted guy. All this just to make up for his own inadequacies.

BRAD

(toasting)

I'll drink to that.

SLADE

You'll drink to anything.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

SCENE 2: another night

(The bar is empty except for Slade. Lisa, wearing a striped T-shirt, enters.)

LISA

Vodka tonic.

(She pulls out her iPhone. Does not look up.)

SLADE

Any particular vodka?

LISA

House is fine. Nice place. You worked here long?

SLADE

About a year.

LISA

Like it here?

SLADE

Yeah, it's quiet. Laid back. Suits me. I used to work in a place where I served \$15 cocktails to women wearing short sequined skirts and stilettos.

(She puts down her iPhone and engages with him.)

LISA

Why'd you leave? Tips must have been better there.

SLADE

The owners were a nightmare. A crazy Chinese lady and her rabid right-wing partner-slash-boyfriend. They'd never let you shut down their regulars no matter how drunk they got. And there were some classic regulars, let me tell you. Like Las Vegas Man—dressed and acted like Dean Martin. And Woo Woo Man—at first I thought he had Tourette's syndrome but it turns out he just liked to yell out "Woo Woo" when he got drunk.

LISA

You gave your regulars pet names?

SLADE

Yep. Kept me amused.

LISA

Yeah?

SLADE

Like Cyborg man—had a knee replacement and was always trying to show off his scar. You know, 10% of the US population is technically cyborg—electronic pace makers, artificial joints, silicon-chip implants. Plus the cyborg is without a doubt the most interesting metaphor of our time.

LISA

What do you mean?

SLADE

I've read that the cyborg is at the intersection of three of the dualisms that have been basic to modern Western culture: animal v human, organism v machine, and fiction v reality.

LISA

You sound like a philosopher.

SLADE

Just an observer.

LISA

Okay, hit me again.

SLADE

Another Vodka tonic?

LISA

No another observation.

SLADE

You pick things up working in a bar. Why do Zebras have strips?

LISA

I don't know... camouflage?

SLADE

Yeah, that's been one theory. Also heat management, predator defense, social interaction... but it turns out none of those are the evolutionary driver for zebra stripes.

LISA

So what's the reason?

SLADE

Biting flies. Biting flies don't detect animals with stripes. Stripes disrupt the fly's ability to detect the animal in nature.

LISA

Do you think that's true for this shirt I'm wearing?

SLADE

Probably just the opposite. It's designed to attract flies... at least barflies...

LISA

Thanks a lot.

SLADE

I observe, then classify, then name. The scientific method.

LISA

So how do you begin your customer classification?

SLADE

First I divided them up into introvert or extrovert.

LISA

What am I?

SLADE

Probably an introvert in extrovert clothing.

LISA

Okay, so after classifying customers as either introvert or extrovert what do you do?

SLADE

I place them on the happiness scale.

LISA

How do you do that?

SLADE

I listen. People tell me things. I ask questions. *(looking at her very intensely)*
For example, what's wrong with your life?

LISA

What's wrong with my life? I'll tell you. I sit up late at night with a glass of wine checking out random dudes on a dating site. What about you?

SLADE

I'm not really able to fall in love.

LISA

Why not?

SLADE

Psychologists believe that the lack of trust in childhood prevents us from being able to love as an adult.

LISA

What do you think?

SLADE

Probably I'm just a selfish jerk who doesn't want to commit.

LISA

Relationships shouldn't be so hard. So difficult.

SLADE

Why not? If we all agree that life is messy and complicated why do we expect our relationships to be simple and pure?

LISA

I still believe you can have a great, romantic, spectacular, relationship—love and be loved-- if you just try hard enough. You've got to try. You've got to keep

yourself open. You've got to keep trying to find someone who is also trying. You've got to keep searching that damn Internet, those dating sites... That's life...

SLADE

But what if you're wrong?

LISA

About?

SLADE

About life. About who you are. What you believe in. What if what you think is important, isn't?

LISA

But...

SLADE

No, listen. What if you've got it all wrong? What if we all have it all wrong? What if we're off on a really bad path and we can never get back to where we were before we took this turn... before we backed ourselves into so tight a little corner...

LISA

Too scary to think about.

SLADE

You're right. Too scary. And way too depressing.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

SCENE 3: later that night

(Slade is behind the bar. Lisa and Kara sit at the bar. Both are on their iPhones.)

LISA

Guess you know the Internet dating scene pretty well.

KARA

I keep my hand in but I have a boyfriend. He's not a great catch but I didn't plan on keeping him anyway. We're pretty much in the final stage of breaking up. It's lonely. I'm going to have to start going back online seriously again.

LISA

Sometime you can feel the most lonely when you are in a relationship going sour.

SLADE

You know, the loneliest one among us all is not necessarily the one who is alone but the one who is trying the hardest not to be alone.

KARA

Sometimes I feel the most lonely when I'm in a room full of people.

SLADE

Twenty 20 year old men are most attracted to 20 year old women, by 25 they are more attracted to 21 year old women, at 30 they are back to 20 year olds again, and at 40 they want a 21 year old woman. In other words, men from 20 to 40 want women who are 20 or 21.

KARA

Yikes! That's depressing.

LISA

You tried Zoosk?

KARA

Nope. Did try MateUp.

LISA

Yew... I hate that site. Full of Brads and Chads. I can't take those guys with restless leg syndrome—bouncing their knees up and down, up and down, like a jackhammer.

KARA

Yeah, our Brad here is one of the Braddiest and Chadiest of all Brads and Chads.

LISA

He's not that bad, but he is a drunk.

KARA

I have a friend who had 42 coffee dates before she gave up. All the guys cared about was what gym she worked out in.

LISA

I hear you. I went on ProfessionalsOnly but I kept attracting older guys who wanted to ask my advice about younger women. One guy spent the whole date

asking me if I thought it was possible if the 17-year-old daughter of a friend of his could really be interested in him.

KARA

Once I had a great dinner with a guy—really clicked--until he walked me to my car and asked if I would like to spank him.

LISA

What'd you say?

KARA

No, but I'll gladly slug you in the jaw.

LISA

And the married guys who click "currently separated."

KARA

I did have an affair with a married man I met on line. He wasn't very sophisticated. I think I was good for him. I got him to stop wearing white socks with his sandals.

LISA

What are you looking for?

KARA

I just want someone to stay home with, cuddle on the couch and watch movies. Eat popcorn. And he's really rich. You?

LISA

I just want to find somebody to spend the rest of my life with. But how do I get to that point?

KARA

I think feminism took a wrong turn when it got women thinking they could detach sex from love and caring.

LISA

And you always have to cope with some guy's selfishness or dishonesty. Or worst of all his insecurity. What men lie about most in their online profile is their height.

KARA

Yeah, like you'd fail to notice when you meet him. I had a date with one guy who said he was 5'6" but was really 5' 3" or so and I immediately went into a plié position.

(Kara gets off the bar stool and demonstrates.)

LISA

Oh god, you're right. I always feel I need to build a man's ego up...

SLADE

Men have reasons to be insecure. They die younger than women. They are more prone to coronary disease. They find it difficult to seek help when they need it. They regard illness as a sign of weakness.

KARA

Yeah, well, tough shit. Things aren't so great for women either. There's plenty we have to deal with in our lives.

LISA

Yeah, like always trying to look fabulous...

KARA

And posting all that fabulousness... Speaking of which, Lisa, I need to take a selfie. You and me, best buds.

(Kara moves in on Lisa and puts her arm around her and starts snapping photos.)

LISA

Please, Kara, I really don't want to...

KARA

Come on... I need some new photos to post.

LISA

I look a mess... my hair...

KARA

I want to show everyone my new best friend.

LISA

Kara, I've known you for like three minutes...

KARA

I need a full length shot...

(She hands the phone/camera to Slade and pulls Lisa up off the bar stool.)

Thanks, Slade.

KARA

(She strikes various poses with Lisa. Slade takes various shots. Lisa stands there like a wooden stick while Kara strikes pose after sexy pose. Kara pulls up her shirt a little bit and puts her thumbs on the top of her pants pulling them down a bit.)

KARA
Gotta show them abs. I worked like a mother for those. Okay, Lisa, turn around. Over your shoulder. Have to flaunt my butt. Not quite Brazilian but it'll do.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

SCENE 4 - another night

(Matt and Brad sit at the bar. Both are on iPhones. Kara is at the other end of the bar on her iPhone. Slade is behind the bar. Lisa walks in.)

The usual?

SLADE

Yep.

LISA

Hey, Lisa. I got some pickup lines.

MATT

Oh, god, please.

LISA

MATT
No, these are great. There are all these sites with pickup lines. Here's one: I was so enchanted by your beauty that I ran into that wall over there. So I'm going to need your name and number for insurance purposes.

LISA
That's so pathetic. Guys going online to get pickup lines.

BRAD

(to Matt)

You on Pickup Lines Galore?

MATT

Yep. They got great categories: dirty, Disney, cheesy, math, Harry Potter...

BRAD

Here's one: You look so familiar... didn't we take a class together? I could've sworn we had chemistry.

MATT

Here's one: You're so beautiful you made me forget my pick up line.

LISA

I miss the old standards: May I buy you a drink? Do you want to dance?

BRAD

Oh, here's a good suggestion. Use a put down. I love your hair cut. Must be the style 'cause I saw five women today with that exact same cut. Supposed to make the woman feel all insecure and unsure of herself.

LISA

Or make her think you are a total jerk.

(Lisa takes her drink and moves over next to Kara.)

LISA

Hi, Kara. What are you doing?

KARA

Working on my timeline. Your major milestones: marriage, acquisition of a pet, purchase of a house, first Christmas with your spouse, birth of children, honeymoon. Of course I don't have any of those but it has minor milestones too—the song I listened to on Tuesday and what I had for dinner on Friday. I'm working on my minor milestones.

(Matt puts down his iPhone.)

MATT

Yee, gods, what happens when you get older? Your first divorce? The foreclosure on your house? You begin taking cholesterol medication?

LISA

Doesn't it assume that your past is so interesting that it deserves to be on the Internet? Forever?

SLADE

It's just a way to gather more information on you. The more you post the more Facebook collects about you—data that is extremely valuable to companies that want to sell you things.

KARA

But if you're not on Facebook basically you just don't exist.

SLADE

All of our social rituals are changing. You know you can Skype into a funeral—a whole new way of mourning is going to develop.

KARA

I don't think things are changing much. Except maybe people don't want to get married. They don't want to settle down.

LISA

Yep, nobody is out looking long-term. We're all short-term.

BRAD

I just want to hang out with my friends. Get tattooed and live life.

KARA

Have fun.

LISA

Women my age are too busy having a career, having a job, not really having fun.

SLADE

All you guys think about is dating. Look around you at what the hell is going on? Terrorist groups are selling stuff on the Internet: T-shirts, toys, hoodies.

KARA

So what? Facebook's a good thing. Like giving everyone the chance to be the star in their own ongoing personal documentary.

SLADE

A fictionalized documentary.

MATT

That's for sure.

SLADE

What's the current mindset?

MATT

Boredom?

SLADE

And what created that mind-set? No challenges. We live in a void and what created that void? Lack of community, technology, detachment, lazy thinking...

KARA

This is so much fun. I love you guys. I love hanging out with all of you.

BRAD

Okay, Slade, give us another fancy word.

SLADE

Agnotology

KARA

How do you...

SLADE

A-g-n-o-t-o-l-g-y

MATT

Who are you anyway? In witness protection?

LISA

A professor who didn't get tenure?

KARA

(reading her iPhone)

The study of the culturally induced ignorance or doubt... the cultural production of ignorance... a neologism... what's a neologism?

SLADE

A new word. A name for a newly coined term. The issue is if we live in the information society how come we are drowning in ignorance?

BRAD

(toasting)

I'll drink to that.

SLADE/KARA/LISA

You'll drink to anything.

LISA
(to Kara)

I like your outfit.

KARA
Thanks. (to Matt) And I love your outfit—sort of your basic death of the salesman look.

BRAD
What about my outfit?

LISA
(sarcastically)
Very stylish.

MATT
Brad, men don't wear outfits.

KARA
Sure they do. I love men in working-class chic.

MATT
What do you know about working-class anything?

BRAD
Yeah, Kara, you wouldn't know working class if it bit you in the ass. Hey, Slade, tell her something about the working class?

SLADE
The economic base determines the superstructure.

MATT
What are you? A Marxist?

SLADE
You can talk about social class without being a Marxist. Marxism had its day. Didn't work out so well as an economic policy, did it?

KARA
Nor a fashion statement—all that boring gray...

LISA
... and those stupid Mao hats with the red star in front.

SLADE

The problem with Marxism was it didn't account for human nature. Especially male human nature—power, control...

MATT

Testosterone...

SLADE

Marxist theory is dead. There are no more big ideas. Those who believe the world can improve at all, know it is only by baby steps.

BRAD

Slade, what the fuck are you talking about?

SLADE

Nothing. Forget it. Another round?

BRAD

(toasting)

I'll drink to that.

SLADE/KARA/LISA/MATT

You'll drink to anything.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

Scene 5: another night

(Slade is behind the bar. Lisa is the only customer.)

LISA

You got a code name for me yet?

SLADE

Oh, that'd be zebra stripes.

LISA

So where have you put me on the happiness scale?

SLADE

Actually, you're pretty high up. Eight to nine.

LISA

That's good to know. Give me your next type of classification?

SLADE

I like to identify customers with a basic plot line.

LISA

Really?

SLADE

There are seven basic plot lines.

LISA

For example?

SLADE

Rags to riches. The Cinderella story.

LISA

Oh, my god, that'd be Kara.

SLADE

Overcoming the monster.

LISA

Brad?

SLADE

Definitely.

LISA

And Matt?

SLADE

Oh, harder to say. Maybe rebirth. He certainly could use one. Or maybe the quest.

LISA

The quest might be you.

SLADE

Possible, but it's more likely I'm tragedy--the fall from grace.

LISA

What about me?

SLADE

Oh, you're most likely voyage and return.

LISA

Yeah, I have no idea where I'm going and less an idea where I'd return to. At least I'm on the move. But are you sure you're tragedy?

SLADE

Yep, the revenge variation. I didn't kill my father but I sure am making him suffer.

(Kara enters.)

SLADE

Hi, Kara. Moscow Mule?

KARA

Yes, please. I'll have a glass of water first. Just came from spinning class.

LISA

You're really the epitome of self-discipline.

KARA

That's me. The modern woman and her to do list: one, pilatisize, two botoxify, three liposuctionate.

(Brad wanders in already slightly drunk.)

BRAD

Greetings, everyone. We really must stop meeting like this. It'll start to look like we have no place else to go.

SLADE

Good to see you too.

LISA

Hi, Brad.

KARA

(pulling out a stool for him)

Over here, Slugger.

BRAD

(to Lisa)

You wouldn't have an aspirin, would you?

LISA

Is that a pick up line?

SLADE

One aspirin coming right up.

(Matt enters.)

BRAD

Oh, good, the gang's all here.

LISA/KARA

Hi, Matt.

MATT

What's up?

KARA

Isn't it great that we have each other?

MATT

What do you mean have each other?

KARA

Like friends, like we're getting to know all about each other. Like a co-ed fraternity.

LISA

Or a co-ed sorority.

BRAD

Always with the feminist response.

KARA

We know a lot about each other.

BRAD

Hey, Kara, I don't know what you do for a living.

KARA

I frame pictures.

BRAD

What kind of pictures?

KARA

All kinds. I work in a picture framing shop. We frame everything—from old family photos to crappy posters to hang over the couch. Very boring. I'd like to start my own business.

MATT

What kind of business?

KARA

I'm not sure. Maybe cupcakes. I make really good cupcakes and I love to decorate them. I thought maybe I could start a business that sells them to restaurants.

MATT

Tough business. How to distinguish your cupcakes from all the others out there.

BRAD

(in a mechanical voice) Recalculating route. (normal voice) Hey, Slade, can you put on some music? I think we need some music.

SLADE

Sure.

(Slade plays the music fairly loud so they have to shout to be heard.)

KARA

Come on, Brad, dance.

(Brad gets up to dance but stumbles into the bar stool.)

BRAD

Don't you hate it when that happens?

(Kara, Lisa, and Brad dance alone, each in their own world, with their own steps.)

KARA

Come on, Matt, dance.

(Matt joins them.)

BRAD

Slade, get out here.

If I can do it, you can do it.

MATT

(Slade joins them. They all dance each in their own little world.)

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

Scene 6: another night

(Kara, Matt, Lisa, and Brad sit at the bar.
Slade is behind the bar.)

LISA

Okay, who turns on their computer in the morning and gets their email before they get their coffee?

MATT

Me.

BRAD

Me.

SLADE

I do.

KARA

I don't drink coffee.

LISA

Okay, before you brush your teeth.

KARA

Me.

LISA

See my point? *(beat)* Bet Brad has a "Yo" app.

MATT

Brad?

BRAD

(admitting)

Yo.

LISA

See my point? *(beat)* A woman in Lebanon created a survival tweet.

KARA

What's that?

LISA

She got tired of having to tweet everyone who'd be worried about her after every bombing so she invented an app. I'm alive. One touch and a tweet goes out to all your followers saying I'm still alive. After a terrorist bombing networks are all jammed—this lets you notify everyone you're okay.

MATT

Good for war zones.

KARA

Good for earthquakes.

BRAD

Good for bar fights.

MATT

If you hook it to one of those health monitors and it reads that your pulse has stopped will it send out a tweet I'm dead?

BRAD

Wonder how many people I'd send that to. Wonder who'd really care.

LISA

Interesting question. Have to think about my list.

MATT

May turn out that none of us really has anyone who cares.

KARA

We care. We're all best buddies here. We're really close. We've got something special here. Best friends forever. I love you guys.

(Brad makes motions to go.)

BRAD

Tab, Slade.

MATT

Me too.

(Except for Lisa they all settle up with Slade during the following conversation and make their moves to leave.)

You leaving? LISA

Gonna go watch Survivor. BRAD

You've got to be kidding. LISA

Dog eat dog... love it. BRAD

I'd never watch that. I like shows that aren't so stupid... and that are real... KARA

Like? BRAD

Project Runway for example. KARA

What's reality, Kara? BRAD

Reality is when things are for real, like really real, like they're really as real as reality can make them real... Like shit, man, this is for real... KARA

Reality TV—what's real? They shoot 60 hours of footage to get one hour of show. MATT

Besides the people are so unattractive. Who wants to look at ugly people? Only pretty people should be on TV. KARA

Give me a good cop show anytime. MATT

Bye, everyone, catch you later. BRAD

Bye, guys, love you. KARA
(Matt, Kara, and Brad exit. A stillness after the flurry of the exits. Slade and Lisa take a moment.)

Survival is insufficient. SLADE

Plato? LISA

Star Trek. SLADE

Do you know what you need, Slade? LISA

A girl friend? SLADE

No. LISA

A lawyer? SLADE

You need to take risks. LISA

Back at you, Lisa. SLADE

I'm better in theory than in practice. LISA

Me, too. The world has turned out to be pretty disappointing. SLADE

I'm with you there, bud. My general state of being is pretty much confused, scared, lonely. LISA

SLADE

That's how we come into the world. And then if we get lucky we have parents who fool us into thinking that isn't the case. Until you reach adolescence, then it's back to confused, scared, lonely.

LISA

A few get to stay in that ignorance-is-bliss state. But then a life unexamined is not worth living...

SLADE

Plato.

LISA

My aunt Cressy. So wipe the fog off the rose-colored glasses and deal...

SLADE

We've always got our avoidance mechanisms... religion... drugs...

LISA

(raising her glass)

Alcohol...

SLADE

But then we die—confused, scared, and devastatingly lonely. What it is, is what it is.

LISA

Plato?

SLADE

James Brown.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

Scene 7: another night

(Matt, Brad, Kara, and Slade are huddled at the bar.)

KARA

How come Asian women are getting all the eligible guys?

MATT

I guess guys think they are more pliable, soft, not so in your face.

BRAD

And never spew out that feminist crap.

KARA

But supposedly they have big dark nipples.

BRAD

So what's wrong with that?

SLADE

It's called "yellow fever." The white guy drawn to the exotic. The stereotype of the Chinese women--less aggressive, more submissive, sex-kitten...

BRAD

Hey, Matt, you ever dated a chink?

SLADE

Cool it, Brad...

MATT

Jesus, Brad... Language.

BRAD

(indicating Kara)

Well, she started it.

(Lisa enters.)

LISA

Hi, guys, what's happening? What are you talking about?

SLADE

Oh, just bar talk.

LISA

You're discussing classical music? Bartok? As in Bela Bartok?

MATT

No, as in shooting the shit around a bar.

KARA

How do you spell Bartok?

LISA

B-a-r-t-o-k.

(Kara types on her iPhone.)

BRAD

How about Bela Lugosi? Now that was one scary dude.

KARA

(reading)

A Hungarian composer and pianist. Considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century. Through his analytical study of folk music, he was one of the founders of comparative musicology, which later became ethnomusicology.

BRAD

Now there's a Slade word for you. Hey, Lisa, guessing you're a liberal? I seem to be surrounded by a bunch of politically correct lefty liberals.

LISA

I'm an independent.

MATT

Ya, you would be.

SLADE

Bar rules. Don't talk religion. Don't talk politics.

BRAD

(getting belligerently drunk)

No, let's discuss politics. We're all friends here. Who agrees with me? Things are going just fine except we shouldn't let any of those foreigners in— Chinks, Japs, Cambodians--the whole slanty-eyed lot. Taking our jobs.

SLADE

Brad, not the time, not the place...

BRAD

What da think, independent Lisa?

SLADE

Let's skip politics. Another round? Anyone?

LISA

(full of sarcasm)

You're right, Brad. Those damn Chinks. Coming over here and sending their kids to school to get all A's. What bastards. And those Japs. Same thing. Their kids all become doctors and lawyers.

BRAD

(missing her sarcasm)

And the Arabs...

LISA

(full of sarcasm)

Yep, those towel heads are all over our shopping malls spending money like it's going out of style. And those damn Pakistanis and Indians—going to our universities and learning all that computer shit.

SLADE

Okay, Lisa, you've made your point.

BRAD

Damn foreigners...

LISA

Hey, Brad, what about the Wops? If we hadn't let them into New York there would be no Mafia today. And the Micks. Dumb stupid Catholics. All those damn kids. They took over the Boston Police department. Why'd we let Catholics in anyway? Our Founding Fathers were protestants, after all. And Kikes—came to New York and took over The New York Times. And the banks. Money lenders every one of them. And those Pollacks-- all those stupid Pollacks. Those Pollack jokes prove how stupid the Pollacks are.

MATT

Lisa, cool it, he's drunk.

LISA

Just extending his logic that's all.

SLADE

You know there's an evolutionary explanation for the liberal and conservation divide. The tribe needed both the liberal types to take risks, to explore, to breed outside the tribe and the conservative types to stay at home base, keep strangers out. It's in our DNA.

BRAD

I'm with you, Lisa, we need to secure our borders...

SLADE

The theory is that our political convictions are hard-wired. The tribe needed both political types.

LISA

What about Alaska? Why'd we ever make that a state? Those Eskimos are really Chinks—Chinks who crossed over the Bering Strait thousands of years ago. Hawaii—the same thing. All those Islanders—Chinks, originally. And the Redskins, sorry, “Native Americans,” originally Chinks one and all.

BRAD

Damn right.

LISA

And I hate the Armenians—Armenia is close to Romania and you know what Romanians are—damn gypsies. And the Spanish. Thank god they went to South American. But then they fucked the Indians and now all their offspring want to cross the border into our land.

BRAD

More border security, that's what we need.

LISA

And the French. I hate the French.

BRAD

Yeah, snotty bastards.

LISA

But, geez, at least they only went to New Orleans. They're the ones who gave us the Statue of Liberty with all that give us your tired and your poor shit. We ought to send that statute right back to them. COD.

BRAD

Yeah, that'd show 'em.

LISA

And Krauts. I hate Krauts—think about WW II. Besides they tend to be big, fat, and ugly. (*to Brad*) You aren't a Kraut, are you? You kind of look like a Kraut. Sorry. Didn't mean to offend.

BRAD

No, I'm not a Kraut. Not that I know of.

LISA

I guess that pretty much leaves the Scandinavians. They're okay. Kind of dull but at least they have blue eyes and blond hair.

SLADE

Brad, you need to call it a night.

BRAD

Yeah, you're right. See you all later.

MATT

You're walking, right?

BRAD

Yep.

(Brad leaves.)

MATT

You got that out of your system, Lisa?

SLADE

No wonder the world's such a mess. We can't even get along here in this little tiny microcosm.

LISA

It just goes to show you that you can think you know someone and you don't know them at all.

KARA

Jeez, all I asked was why so many white guys are dating Asian women.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

SCENE 8: another night

(Everyone is sitting around the bar looking at their phones. Each is isolated. There is no energy in the room. They are all quite drunk. Brad is very drunk and has his head on the bar. He suddenly wakes up.)

BRAD

Okay, this is boring. Let's liven up this party. What is this a god damned funeral? Matt's buying this round. Okay, come on. Let's go, folks. We're all buddies. Shit, we see each other almost every night. Let's drop the masks. We're like people who have lost their souls. Fucking zombies. Let's get down and dirty. Revelation time. Any one gay?

KARA

I tried it once with a girlfriend.

BRAD

How'd it work out?

KARA

I can't remember. I was only twelve.

BRAD

Anyone else?

MATT

I got nothing.

BRAD

Me neither.

LISA

Sometimes I wish I were. Women are so much nicer than men.

BRAD

(in a mechanical voice)

Recalculating route. Incest? Anyone?

(They all shake their head no.)

KARA

I always hated my brother.

BRAD

Anyone ever commit a felony?

ALL

Not me. No. Nope.

BRAD

Come on. DWIs? Embezzlement? Money laundering?

LISA

Matt's the only one who's got enough money to launder.

BRAD

My brother didn't pay his income taxes for eight years. I didn't turn him in.

SLADE

Felony by omission.

MATT

Doesn't count.

BRAD

Okay, gang, come one. (*in a mechanical voice*) Recalculating route. (*in a normal voice*) How about the seven deadly sins. What's the last seven deadly sin that you committed?

KARA

I don't even know what they are.

MATT

Sloth is one.

KARA

I could never do sloth. Why are they called deadly?

SLADE

They're the mortal sins.

KARA

You mean they're mortal because mortals commit them?

SLADE

No, a mortal sin means you go to hell immediately.

KARA

Oh.

(They all try to come up with them.)

BRAD

Okay, sloth that's one. Then there's gluttony... Greed...

MATT

Avarice...

BRAD
Same as greed...

KARA
Envy.

LISA
Sloth, gluttony, greed, envy... Then there's wrath, pride... lust.

MATT
Oh, hell, we all have committed those.

KARA
They all sound like pretty positive traits to me except, of course, for that sloth thing.

LISA
And gluttony.

KARA
Why is it called envy instead of jealousy? What's the difference?

SLADE
Envy is wanting or longing for what you don't have...

LISA
Why live at all if you don't long for something you don't have?

SLADE
Jealousy is when you lose something or someone to someone else.

KARA
I don't get it.

SLADE
You envy Brad Pitt if you want a wife like Angelina Jolie. You're jealous of Brad Pitt if your wife leaves you for him.

KARA
What is it if I just want to be Angelina Jolie so I could have slept with Brad Pitt?

MATT/LISA
Lust.

BRAD

These sins don't sound so deadly to me. Greed, envy and pride keep you on your toes.

MATT

Wrath is good. Stand up for yourself. Be a man.

KARA

I think the list needs a little updating.

BRAD

What do you mean?

KARA

Something more modern like Thou shall not deal drugs.

SLADE

Thou shall nots—that's the ten commandments.

KARA

Same thing. A bunch of rules.

LISA

Kara's on to something. Environmental pollution should be a deadly sin. And homophobia. And denying climate change.

MATT

Accumulating great wealth. Eye of a needle and all that.

BRAD

Are you Catholic?

MATT

Lapsed.

SLADE

Are there any other kind?

KARA

Once when I was little I went to Saturday morning church school with my Catholic cousin. The nun was teaching us how to hold our hands in prayer and said if they were slack and not pushed tightly against each other the devil could get in. I spent the whole next week holding my hands slacked in the prayer position looking for the devil. He never appeared and I guess that's why I ended up an agnostic.

SLADE

Too chicken-shit to be an atheist?

KARA

I could've believed in a virgin birth but that snakes could talk—that's where I drew the line.

MATT

What about you, Lisa? You religious?

LISA

Let's just say I'm a romantic atheist. Isn't adultery a seven deadly sin?

SLADE

Covered under lust.

BRAD

Okay, now we're getting somewhere. Who has committed adultery?

SLADE

How can any of us have committed adultery? None of us are married.

KARA

Does sleeping with a married man count?

BRAD

Sure. Fess up. Details.

KARA

I had an affair with a married man. For two years. Then he asked out my best friend. He told her he wanted to talk about me but it was just an excuse to see her.

BRAD

What did you do?

KARA

The obvious. I emailed his wife. It was a really mean thing to do but he made me so mad. I didn't think he should get away with it so I wrote his wife and said I'd been having an affair with her husband for the last two years. Now he has started to see my best friend and I think that isn't fair. I attached a picture of myself so she could see that I'm not cheap. I wanted her to see that I am respectable. Then I told her she should keep better tabs on her husband and not let him run around with my best friend.

LISA

Oh, wow, he must hate you.

I don't care. I hate him.

KARA

Yikes... what a terrible thing to do.

MATT

A woman scorned...

SLADE

Well, on the other hand, it seems men always get away with everything.

LISA

(Kara starts to sniffle. They surround her to comfort her.)

Oh, come on. It's not so bad. I slept with one of the bridesmaids on my wedding night.

MATT

What?

LISA

You were married?

BRAD

Not very long.

MATT

You slept with somebody else on your wedding night? What the hell were you thinking?

KARA

Actually I didn't sleep with her on my wedding night. I slept with her on my wedding early evening.

MATT

I don't believe that...

LISA

A mere technicality...

SLADE

God, you're more of a bastard than I am.

BRAD

MATT

My wife, now ex-wife, Diane, and her mom were busy cleaning up after the reception and I was bored. I didn't have anything to do.

LISA

You could have helped them clean up.

MATT

I don't think they really wanted me around. They were having such a good time together. Besides, I was depressed.

BRAD

Wow, Matt! Can anyone top that? Come on, Slade, you've been awfully quiet.

SLADE

What you see is what you get.

KARA

I don't believe that...

LISA

You're the man of mystery here...

BRAD

Still waters run deep...

MATT

I've always suspected you work for the CIA.

BRAD

Yeah, you know way too much shit for a bartender...

MATT

You're not a farm boy from Indiana, are you?

LISA

You told me Illinois... What gives?

KARA

I thought you were from the south.

SLADE

I'm from back East.

MATT

Hell, when I moved out here I noticed that to all you Californians any place east of Palm Springs is back East.

BRAD

Okay, fess up, where are you from?

SLADE

New Canaan, Connecticut.

MATT

Fancy...

BRAD

Ah, a rich boy...

KARA

(typing on her iPhone)

How do you spell Canaan?

ALL

Kara!

SLADE

Nothing much to tell. I went to prep school...

BRAD

A real live preppy...

MATT

Exeter? Andover?

SLADE

St. Paul's... Then I went to college.

MATT

Harvard or Yale?

SLADE

Princeton... I went to George Washington Law School. Passed the bar. Joined a law firm. But what I really wanted to be was a writer. I went to work as a dishwasher in a fancy restaurant in D.C. so I'd have plenty of time to write. Started a novel...

MATT

Well, I'll be damned...

KARA

I knew there was something about you...

BRAD

This is great...

SLADE

The writing didn't go so well but at the restaurant I worked my way up from dish washer to bartender. See, I got ambition.

LISA

Why'd you give up writing to become a bartender?

SLADE

For all the right reasons. Steady paycheck. Don't have to get up in the morning. Hurt my father.

BRAD

Thank you, Slade, that was huge. Okay, can anyone begin to top that?

KARA

I'm pregnant.

ALL

Oh my god. Really? Wow...

KARA

No. Just kidding. But I really got you going didn't I?

(Slade goes back to refreshing drinks.)

BRAD

Okay, now we're getting somewhere. Any more confessions? Nope, okay. How about dirty little secrets? I got it. Tell something that you've never told anyone before. Kara, you go first.

KARA

I'm thinking.

MATT

(blurting it out)

I was fired from my job last October.

SLADE
Gee, man ...

BRAD
I had no idea...

LISA
Oh, Matt, I'm sorry...

KARA
No shit...

MATT
I worked for Verizon for seven years. I got laid off last October. I had six weeks of vacation time coming. I got severance pay. I didn't want to change my life style. I got money saved up.

BRAD
You should a told me, man.

MATT
I'm trying to decide if I want to be an entrepreneur or an employee. I go out every day and look around. I might buy a franchise—gym, hair salon, juice bar. I didn't want anybody to know.

LISA
That's nothing to be ashamed of...

KARA
You're in better shape that most of us...

MATT
I got a friend who is VP of a satellite company—TV for rural areas. If he leaves, I might take his job—I'd have all the territory west of Colorado.

SLADE
God, that's sound great...

KARA
You'll come out on top...

LISA
Sure you will...

I killed my mother. BRAD

What... LISA

You mean like in childbirth? She died when you were born? KARA

Nope. I killed her. BRAD

What are you talking about... LISA

What are you saying... SLADE

Jesus, Brad... MATT

BRAD
She got cancer. She was in a lot of pain. She kept asking me to. I didn't want to do it. The doctor kept explaining to me about what an overdose would do. He kept leaving me more and more pills and kept telling me over and over what an overdose would be.

Oh, Brad, I'm so sorry. KARA

You did the right thing, Brad. LISA

(Lisa and Kara put their arms around him to comfort him.)

Lisa, your uber is here. SLADE

(Lisa prepares to leave.)

You guys are great but you just don't get it. LISA

Get what? KARA

LISA

Kara, you can't just wait for Santa Claus to bring you Mr. Wonderful. To drop him in your stocking Christmas morning. There is no Mr. wonderful that's going to put all your pieces together. You've got to do it yourself. On your own—out in the deep dark void. You need to be your own Santa Claus. And, Brad, you can't find yourself in the bottom of a Jack Daniels' bottle. You know we all are on a path and many of us will get stopped along the way—alcohol, drugs, whatever. There is absolutely no guarantee that you make it down the path unless you are a warrior. You need to find the warrior in you. And, Slade, what a waste. All your brains and education. You're smart. You're insightful. You're charming and have a way with people. What in the hell are you doing? Why are you squandering all your god given talents? Matt, you're stuck. Just plan stuck.

MATT

What about you, Lisa? You're just as stuck as the rest of us.

LISA

Damn right and thanks for making it suddenly so clear to me. You've got to figure out how to live your life. You've got to be your own reason to live.

SLADE

No, you've got to accept the universal insignificance of things.

MATT

Always the philosopher.

LISA

I just want to make sense of my life. The only real question is: how are we to live our lives?

(Lisa walks to the door. As she exits, she turns.)

LISA

By the way, I could have fallen in love with you, Slade.

BRAD

God, what was that all about?

MATT

I have no idea.

LIGHTS DOWN

LIGHTS UP

SCENE 9: another night

(Slade is behind the bar. It is empty except for Matt who sits staring at his drink.)

Where is everyone?

MATT

I dunno. Slow night.

SLADE

You seen Lisa recently?

MATT

Nope. Hasn't been in for weeks.

SLADE

What about that other girl? I can't remember her name.

MATT

Kara. I saw her over at McKenna's last weekend. They have a new band— attracts a younger crowd, lots of drinking, dancing, hooking up...

SLADE

What's it all about, Slade?

MATT

Got me.

SLADE

THE END

LIGHTS DOWN